Plot Against King Emphasizes Need To Control FBI's Abuses

By D'ARMY BAILEY

LAST week's report that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and former NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins conspired to destroy the influence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1964 was startling.

Wilkins has denied the report. But a former FBI official allegedly involved in the scheme has admitted to meeting with an unnamed black leader during that period but says he can't remember the details.

Word of the FBI's involvement in plotting against King is not new. The world now knows of the obsession of the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for destroying King and all that he stood for. We know further that Hoover went to unconstitutional excesses in his campaign against King.

NOW THE REPORT of the new plot against King adds further dimension to the FBI activities. It appears that the top leadership of the FBI resorted to playing blacks against blacks in a calculated scheme that would have meant no good to any of the blacks involved.

It is hard to know quite what to make of the allegation that Wilkins was involved and of Wilkins' own heated and firm denial. There were competition and some measure of differences between King's and Wilkins' organizations, and it is conceivable that Wilkins may have collaborated with the FBI to limit King's influence.

During the mid-1960s, Wilkins was a far more acceptable black leader to many whites and officials in high government than was King. Wilkins' style and attitude were to play the game close to the rules and not press black demands so hard as to offend white Americans.

King, by some degree of contrast, broke the rules and forced the demands of blacks to the point that they not only made white Americans uncomfortable but in some instances made it more comfortable for them to bring about changes.

Whether Wilkins was the so-called black leader who met with the FBI or not is not the main point. Wilkins gave valuable service to the nation in heading the NAACP and was a symbol of the aspirations of blacks for a better deal. He is now retired and is today of no great influence in the continuing black struggle for change.

That a legitimate agency of government charged with protecting the rights and liberties of our citizens would conspire against the lawful struggle of blacks by seeking to undermine their organizations and leaders is despicable and unworthy of a free society.

Blacks are not alone as victims and targets of the improper use of the federal police power. In truth, there seems a record of conduct established by FBI officials in recent years to interdict and neutralize American citizens and groups which have been aggressive in the exercise of their First Amendment rights to protest for changes. Among the FBI's victims have been black and white, rich and poor and young and old.

We have come very close to seeing the duplication within our own government of many of the central features of totalitarian dictatorships. We are seeing two sets of law at work. One set enforces the basic law that most Americans come to understand and accept. Another set of laws isn't written on the books but has been understood and accepted to allow government officials to act secretly to subvert the rights of some citizens whose views may have been unpopular or uncomfortable to the government.

Not enough has been done to remedy the excesses and abuses of power that we are learning more and more about. Varying committees of Congress have talked about effectively reorganizing certain government police efforts and placing greater controls on them.

But so far Congress has not done much to reassure us that the internal machinery of government agencies together with priorities and personnel have been sufficiently reorganized that such agencies can now function within the law.

The FBI is an arm of the executive branch of government. As such it should be within the control of the president. However, we know that for years president after president kowtowed to the FBI leadership and refused to put reins on Hoover's conduct.

Since Hoover's death, while there have been replacements of the men at the top, there is still the absence of leadership in the White House to clear up the record of illegalities within the FBI and other agencies. Nor is enough being done to make sure that those responsible have been called to account.

THE LATEST REVELATION of FBI misconduct did not come from the watchful eye of government or Congress. It came from the private efforts of a nonprofit citizens' group that senses the need to watch what our government is doing. As a result of its efforts, the group has performed a valuable public service in bringing forth information of wrongdoing that could have remained buried for many years.

There is the thought that there may be still other information of further wrongdoings. And there is a clear and demonstrated need that our federal officials act promptly to insure that there be but one law. That law must protect the government and the citizens in the rights guaranteed them